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SENATE AGRICULTURE

EXHIBIT NO. 8

DATE 2-17-09

BILL NO. SB 337
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**Testimony to the Montana Senate Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Committee
by Jonathan Proctor, Defenders of Wildlife
February 17, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Jonathan Proctor. I am from Missoula, where I work for Defenders of Wildlife as a Regional Representative. Defenders is a national non-profit conservation organization with more than one million members and supporters nationwide, including 3,200 members who live in Montana. We have been working on wildlife conservation in Montana for over 30 years.

Our work has included collaborating with several Tribal wildlife agencies to restore wildlife on Tribal lands. We have worked with the Blackfeet Nation Fish and Wildlife Department, the Fort Belknap Fish and Game Department, and the Fort Peck Fish and Game Department to restore native bison. These agencies have worked with few financial resources but with a great amount of dedication. Their buffalo programs benefit tribal members in many ways. They also benefit the millions of Americans who want bison restored to at least a few areas across the plains.

But for all these tribes have done, much more must be done to manage this keystone species appropriately in the modern world. Very few bison exist today that are managed as wildlife; even fewer that are also free of cattle genes; and yet fewer that are also brucellosis free. The 42 Yellowstone bison that have endured the three years of quarantine and are now available for relocation to start a new conservation herd are far too valuable to simply slaughter. But Senate Bill 337 would force just that scenario by preventing the relocation of these valuable animals to willing partners who would help our country solve one of its more difficult wildlife challenges.

Defenders of Wildlife and our many members thank these Tribes for their ongoing work to restore our nation's most iconic symbol – the American bison. We hope the Montana legislature also appreciates these Tribes. Wouldn't it be great if our legislature worked with these Tribal wildlife agencies, rather than set up new roadblocks to their success?

Senate Bill 337 is a roadblock, and is unfair. It is unfair to the Tribes who wish to restore an integral part of their history. It is unfair to the bison that have endured far more rigorous brucellosis testing than any of the livestock in this state. And it is unfair to all taxpayers who have paid for this expensive Yellowstone bison brucellosis testing program.

Senate Bill 337 would continue to bring shame on our state for its treatment of our wild bison. It would make existing problems worse. And it would prevent a future where common sense solutions to the conflicts surrounding Montana's wild bison may become reality.

For all of these reasons, Defenders of Wildlife strongly opposes this bill. We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 337. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

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